



RE: Interim Charge 3: Review behavioral health capacity in the state, with a focus on suicide prevention efforts and the provision of behavioral health care services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Review suicide prevention programs and initiatives across state agencies, evaluate their effectiveness, and identify opportunities for greater coordination. Identify gaps in the continuum of care for individuals with disabilities and challenges for those providing care to them. Additionally, identify any existing administrative and licensing barriers that negatively affect overall behavioral health capacity in the state.

To: Public Health Committee, Texas House of Representatives

I am writing on behalf of the Texas Association of School Psychologists and licensed specialists in school psychology (LSSPs) practicing across the state.

**The Comprehensive Role of School Psychologists**

School psychologists have special expertise to help schools successfully meet the needs of a wide range of diverse learners. School psychologists are trained to work with students who have disabilities or health problems, who face cultural or linguistic barriers, or whose family or socioeconomic situation affects their learning. School psychologists partner with teachers to plan appropriate Individualized Education Programs for students with disabilities, help to modify and adapt curricula and instruction, and adjust classroom facilities and routines to promote greater student engagement. School psychologists monitor and effectively communicate with parents about student progress, support effective family engagement in students' school experiences, and coordinate connections with community services.

School psychologists provide critical services to help meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students. One in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern, and research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health supports if they are offered at school. School psychologists are specially trained to provide culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services in schools. School psychologists can provide important mental health services, including counseling, suicide risk assessment and intervention, behavior management, and threat assessment and interventions. They are also skilled in consultation and connecting students with additional community services as needed. School psychologists provide education for students, staff, and parents on the symptoms, warning signs, and risk factors of depression and youth suicide. School psychologists foster effective collaboration with law enforcement, fire and rescue, outside mental health agencies, and cultural liaisons to improve coordination and efficient crisis response and recovery.

School psychologists help schools improve assessment and accountability efforts. A critical part of making informed decisions is the effective use of data. School psychologists bring extensive knowledge of data collection and analysis to school improvement efforts. School psychologists can help school leaders and teachers generate and interpret student data to improve student and school outcomes. School psychologists can consult with school staff to make decisions regarding programs and interventions at the district, building, classroom, and individual student levels. School psychologists can collect and analyze data on risk and protective factors related to student outcomes.

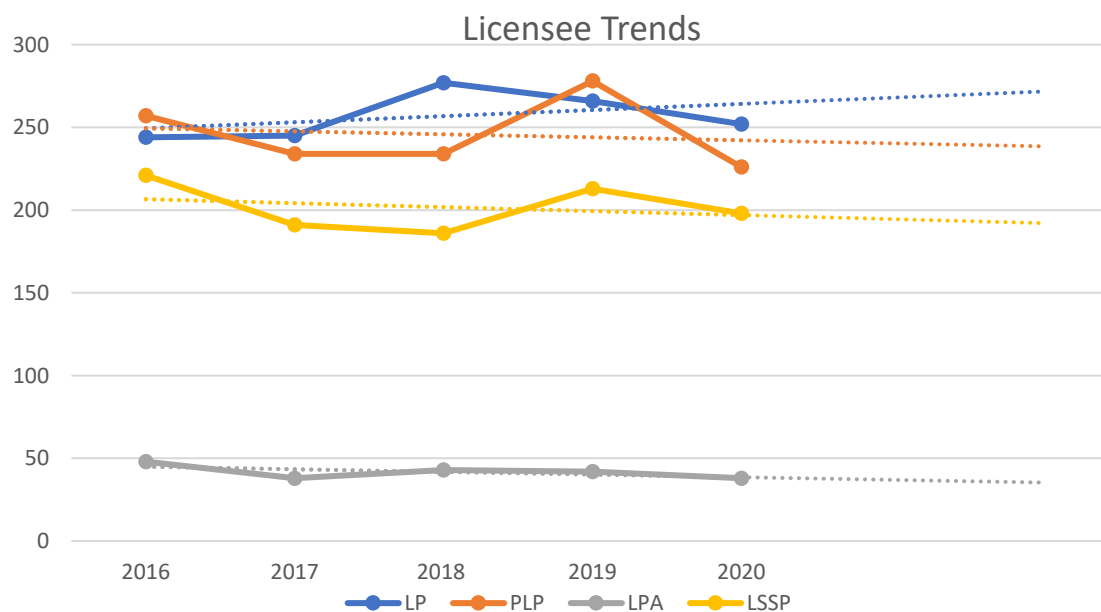
### School Psychologist Ratio Trends in Texas

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. Texas is no exception to the national shortage and the state ratio has remained nearly six times greater than the NASP recommended ratio. The 2019-2020 regional ratios varied across the state ranging from 1:1,549 in Educational Service Center 20 (San Antonio) to 1:21,128 in Educational Service Center 5 (Beaumont). The following table contains information regarding statewide ratios over the past three years:

Texas Ratios	
2017-2018	1 school psychologist for every 2,792 students
2018-2019	1 school psychologist for every 2,773 students
2019-2020	1 school psychologist for every 2,752 students

The following chart includes information regarding new licensees over the past five fiscal years:

Licensees	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Licensed Psychologists (LP)	244	245	277	266	252
Provisionally Licensed Psychologist	257	234	234	278	226
Licensed Psychological Associate (LPA)	48	38	43	42	38
Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP)	221	191	186	213	198
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>714</b>



Consequences of the shortages include:

- unmanageable caseloads
- the inability for school psychologists to provide prevention and early intervention services or regularly consult with families and teachers
- reduced access to mental and behavioral health services for some students
- limited scope of service delivery focused primarily on legally mandated special education practice.

### **Current Challenges for School Psychologists in Texas**

#### ***Lack of Visibility of the School Psychology Field in Texas***

- Parents and fellow educators are unaware of school psychology.
- Requiring professionals to use title of “Licensed Specialist in School Psychology” (LSSP) is confusing to parents, school staff, and public--they don’t know what that means.
- While the Texas Education Code already references “school psychologists,” the use of “School Psychologist” title is prohibited by Texas Occupations Code.
- Incoming college students are not aware of the school psychology program and are not enrolling.
- We cannot attract licensed school psychologists from other states because they lose the professional title while 48 other states allow school psychologists to use that professional title.

#### ***Retention of Current School Psychologists is Difficult***

- Many school psychologists are overworked due to insufficient number of practitioners employed by the district
  - Districts may have a tight budget that won’t allow for additional staff or
  - District budget has funds, but there are no applicants for positions.
- Many school psychologists do not utilize their professional skills. Instead school psychologists facilitate ARD/IEP meetings, schedule ARD meetings, process paperwork, etc.
- Overemphasis on testing/assessment instead of areas of expertise (individual/group counseling, consultation, program evaluation, intervention planning).
- Sole funding source is federal which means school psychologists work with special education students, significantly limiting the scope and impact of skill set and general education students do not get served.
- Due to limited visibility of school psychologists, many school staff do not understand the role of school psychologists, which contributes to a general lack of recognition and appreciation of the work they do.
- Very limited opportunities for advancement in career--higher level/administrative positions are limited in number and often require an advanced degree in education or administration.
- School psychologists are generally not paid in accordance with the level of training and experience they have. (Diagnosticians and ARD Facilitators are given service credit for their years of teaching, resulting in higher salaries than LSSPs despite significantly higher levels of training.)

#### ***Obstacles to School Psychology Training Programs*** (13 school psychology programs in Texas)

- **Night School or Online Courses** - Training programs are not designed for non-traditional/working students, teachers, counselors, etc. who if they want to become school psychologists must quit their job to enroll in classes
- **Tuition for School Psychology Degree** - Cost of higher degree is burdensome.

**Recommendations to Address School Psychologist Shortage (No Fiscal Notes)**

- Allow professionals to identify themselves as a “School Psychologist” consistent with 48 other states. This will allow for increased visibility to parents, school staff, and public and increased awareness of mental health services available in schools.
- Promote profession of school psychology to undergraduate students. Specifically targeting undergraduate education and psychology programs would likely be most impactful. (Informational posters, training program presence at career/college fairs, inviting speakers to introductory college courses).
- Include school psychologists in pertinent statewide policy language involving school-based mental health service providers.
- Provide information to school boards and school district leadership about the role of a school psychologist and how to maximize that resource at the campus level.
- Make clear that school districts may use state funding to conduct assessments and evaluations to be performed by mental health professionals, including school psychologists. Currently, ISDs use federal dollars for school psychologists to perform assessments on special education students.

**Recommendations to Address School Psychologist Shortage (Fiscal Notes)**

- Night School - Incentivize colleges/ training programs to offer coursework that is compatible with students working a full-time job (online, evening, and/or weekend courses).
- Tuition Reimbursement - Reduce financial burden of obtaining a school psychology degree by offering tuition reimbursement and/or loan forgiveness programs.
- Increase Funding in Foundation School Program - Increase state funding for more school psychologist positions.
- Salary Schedules - Adapt salary schedules for school psychologists to adequately reflect their training and years of experience in education.

Thank you,

Amanda Afifi, Chair Government and Professional Relations Committee  
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